DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 063 119 SE 013 615

TITLE	EPA Citizens' Bulletin.
INSTITUTION	Environmental Protection Agency, Washington, D. C.
PUB DATE	Mar 72
NOTE	8p.
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	Action Programs (Community); Activities; Case Studies; *Citizen Participation; *Community Action; Ecology; *Environment; *Group Dynamics; Social Action

ABSTRACT

A kaleidoscope of how citizens in the United States have been answering the question, "What can the average citizen do to protect and enhance the environment?" is presented in this bulletin. Voluntary citizen organizations, environmental organizations, interested individuals, and educational groups are pictured as having combined to fulfill a watchdog role, exerting pro-environmental influence on public opinions, the press, industry, and the government. The scope and impact of their influence is demonstrated by several examples of their undertakings. In addition, the role of private citizens in the environmental quality movement in three American cities (Pittsburgh, San Francisco, Chicago) is described in more detail. It is concluded that citizen activities are an outgrowth of rising public awareness and understanding of environmental problems and of public frustration with the pace at which government and industry have moved to solve these problems. Working within established systems, citizen action groups have helped to focus public opinion on the environment. This case study was prepared by the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency for submission by the government of the United States of America in response to an invitation from the Secretary-General of the United Nations Conference on the Human Environment. (BL)

ED 063119

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EPA
CITIZENS' BULLETIN
U.S. ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY • WASHINGTON, D.C. 20460

Citizen action can get results

THIS CASE STUDY WAS PREPARED BY THE UNITED STATES ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION AGENCY FOR SUBMISSION BY THE GOVERNMENT OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA IN RESPONSE TO AN INVITATION FROM THE SECRETARY-GENERAL OF THE UNITED NATIONS CONFERENCE* ON THE HUMAN ENVIRONMENT.

JL 6/3 6/3

*Conference scheduled in Stockholm, June 5-16, 1972

What can the average citizen do to protect and enhance the environment? That question is often asked of government officials and leaders of private conservation and environmental organizations.

There is no one simple answer. The answers are numerous and varied. Literally hundreds of case histories could be written documenting the activities of individuals and, more importantly, of groups of citizens who have joined together in pursuit of environmental quality in the United States. No single case history could adequately depict the ferment and action which characterizes the citizen environmental movement in the United States. No single case history could adequately explain how citizen organizations play a major role in shaping environmental attitudes, policies and programs.

Consequently, this is not a case history in the usual sense, but rather a kaleidoscope of how citizens in the United States have themselves been answering the question "What can I do?"

Voluntary citizen organizations have long been part of the way of life in the United States. Individuals with common interests — social, civic, cultural, religious, political, business, professional, etc. — have come together in clubs, societies, associations and groups to share these common interests, exchange experiences and pursue mutual goals. Thousands of groups exist, among them now are at least 3,000 conservation and environmental organizations. This number includes approximately 250 national and regional groups and some 400 state organizations. On the local community level, there are approximately 2,500 organizations of individuals concerned about one or more conservation or environmental problems. In addition, there are uncounted civic, church, labor, business, youth, school and women's groups which devote at least some of their efforts to environmental problems.

Environmental organizations vary in size and range of activity. Some employ professional staffs. Some, especially on the local level, operate with volunteers. Some are concerned with a single issue, some with any and all environmental problems. While the scope and degree of their efforts vary, in total they engage in a multitude of activities on behalf of a better environment. They work for water pollution control, cleaner air, noise control, better methods of solid waste disposal, conservation of natural areas, preservation of wildlife, population control, transportation reform, pesticide control and sound resource management.

Some are primarily educational groups. They educate their members and the general public through their publications. Others engage in legislative activities, stimulating their members and the public to make their pro-environmental views known to elected and appointed public officials. Some conduct meetings, workshops and seminars, and engage in political action for or against candidates. Some take legal action to assure that government and industry abide by environmental protection laws and regulations. Directly or indirectly, they bring pressure on government at all levels to enact and implement environmental protection laws and regulations.

In sum, citizen organizations in the environmental field serve as the active, articulate voices of a public which has become increasingly concerned about environmental quality. They fulfill a watchdog role. And they exert a pro-environmental influence on public opinion, on the press, on industry and on government.

The scope and impact of this influence is demonstrated in the following examples which at the same time, provide concrete answers to those who ask "What can I do?"

- Groups of concerned citizens in many cities have formed clear air organizations, mounted public education programs and helped trigger action to reduce air pollution.

- A group of concerned citizens launched a campaign to save San Francisco Bay from further destruction by filling and pollution. Their efforts resulted in a new state law for the conservation of the Bay in the public interest.

- Groups of concerned citizens have won battles against highways which would have destroyed historic or scenic natural areas.

- A group of concerned citizens opposed an electric power company's plan to run a transmission line near the Civil War battlefield of Antietam in Maryland. The line was routed away from the historic site.

- A group of concerned citizens opposed the Federal government's plan to build a dam in the beautiful Red River Gorge in Kentucky. The dam was relocated, and the priceless natural area was preserved.

- A group of concerned citizens in upper New York State warned that a proposed nuclear power plant would damage a beautiful lake in their community. Unable to answer the pointed questions raised by the citizen organization, the power company built a more environmentally-compatible plant elsewhere.

- A group of concerned citizens in Pennsylvania carried their complaint about dust from a steel mill directly to the company's top management. The company installed emission control equipment; the result was cleaner air in the community.

- A group of concerned citizens opposed the destruction of a bird sanctuary in New York City's Jamaica Bay to make way for an extension of Kennedy Airport. The sanctuary was saved.

- A scientist in a Maryland community worked after hours with school children and mounted a community-wide campaign which led to enactment of the first municipal law banning non-returnable soft drink and beer containers.

- A biology teacher in Delaware and his students conducted a door-to-door campaign to save nearby beaches from pollution and development. Planned sewage and industrial facilities were relocated and some of the few remaining natural sand dunes on the east coast were saved. The state government has since enacted the strongest coastal land-use control law in the nation.

- Two university professors spent a summer gathering evidence of water pollution in the Pittsburgh area. With the evidence, the Federal government prosecuted several companies for pollution.

- An airline captain, defying threats that he would be fired, refused to jettison fuel from his aircraft. His action helped bring pressure on airlines to stop this form of pollution.

- Citizens in many cities have formed ecology centers as focal points for environmental education.

- Citizens in many cities have established recycling centers where waste bottles, cans and newspapers are collected for shipment to reprocessing plants for reclamation and reuse.

- Concerned students organized and carried out a nation-wide program of environmental lectures, meetings, teach-ins and other activities on "Earth Day", April 22, 1970. The observances attracted an estimated 20 million participants across the nation, raised environmental awareness to a new height, generated a wide variety of environmental projects and through extensive coverage in the news media, brought the environment as an issue into the homes of virtually all Americans.

- Several concerned organizations worked together to prevent new nuclear plants from adding thermal discharges and radioactive wastes to already polluted Lake Michigan.

- More than 40 national conservation and other organizations worked together to urge Congress to appropriate more funds for sewage treatment plant construction. Through their Citizen's Crusade for Clean Water, they generated enough nation-wide support to influence Congress to approve a substantially higher appropriation.

- Several concerned national organizations conducted educational programs to stimulate public understanding and participation in public hearings on water and air quality standards held by the states under Federal pollution control laws. In many instances, citizen participation resulted in higher standards than originally proposed.

Since the National Environmental Policy Act went into effect January 1, 1970, there have been some two dozen citizen court challenges to Federal actions under that law. They stopped construction of a road and oil pipe line across the Alaskan wilderness pending studies of their environmental impact; protected wildlife areas in Texas and Arizona from development; halted construction of a dam in Arkansas; blocked highway construction in environmentally-sensitive areas; safeguarded parts of national forests pending decisions on preserving them as wilderness areas, and forced the government to hold hearings to determine if the use of certain pesticides should be banned.

The challenges resulted in court decisions affirming the public's right to information on the environmental impact of proposed actions before they are taken and made Federal agencies more sensitive to their environmental responsibilities.

A closer look at three American cities further illustrates the role of private citizens in the environmental quality movement.

Pittsburgh—A "Breathers' Lobby"

On September 9, 1969, the Pennsylvania Air Pollution Commission held a public hearing in Pittsburgh to consider air pollution control standards. The hearing had been scheduled for a small state office, but when nearly 500 people showed up, startled officials hastily moved the meeting to a large auditorium.

The outpouring of concerned citizens was no accident. Prior to that public hearing, a series of citizen workshops had been held in many cities across the country on air pollution problems and ways to combat them. The educational sessions were organized and sponsored by the League of Women Voters, affiliates of the National Tuberculosis and Respiratory Disease Association, the Conservation Foundation and other organizations.

Attending the workshops were representatives of professional, labor, health, civic, women's, consumer, conservation, youth, minority, ethnic, religious, political and industrial groups. Generally, they stimulated the formation of a citizen's coalition or coordinating committee in each city to carry on the fight for clean air.

Pittsburgh was to have been one of those cities, but the state hearing was announced before the workshop could be held. Nevertheless, citizen leaders had been alerted. When the state made its proposed air quality standards available for public review in advance of the hearing, Pittsburgh citizens were prepared. The proposed standards were carefully analyzed — and found wanting. A particular target was the Commission's proposal to allow an annual average level for particulate matter of 100 micrograms per cubic meter of air, with a long-range goal of 80 micrograms. Citizens noted with dismay that available evidence showed that the death rate increased in the over-50 age group when particulate levels exceed 80 micrograms in the presence of sulfur dioxide.

Public reaction was immediate. The governor and the state commission were deluged with letters of protest. Legislators were contacted. A bipartisan group of 14 congressmen wrote to the governor, urging him to reconsider the proposed standards. Citizen pressure continued at the public hearing and after. Within a few days the governor asked the state commission to reconsider its proposed standards. It did so—and the standards were upgraded substantially. The annual average for particulate matter, for example, was set at 65 micrograms per cubic meter — far below the 100 micrograms originally proposed.

It was a clear victory for what the *Wall Street Journal* described as "a curious coalition of unionists, conservationists, health societies, ladies' garden clubs and college-age militants — the so-called breathers' lobby."

But that was only the beginning. Shortly after the public hearing, 43 people who had participated formed a new citizen organization — GASP, the Group Against Smog and Pollution.

Fresh from the victory over the state standards, GASP set out to strengthen the county air pollution code. It succeeded. Then the group went to work to assure that the variance board established by the new regulations would be composed of people representing a wide variety of interests. GASP sent out some 60 letters with questionnaires, interviewed applicants and made recommendations to the county commissioners who appoint the board members. It succeeded again: four of the five members named to the board were people recommended by GASP.

Since then, GASP members have been named to environmental advisory boards at both the county and state levels. At variance board hearings GASP has officially intervened on behalf of the public and backed up with its own scientific committee and other technical resources provided by its members, has cross-examined industry representatives.

GASP has not only prodded and goaded the county air pollution control agency, but supported it as well. It studied the agency's salary scale and when it found salaries were below national averages, the group sparked a campaign for increases which will allow the agency to attract and keep competent staff members.

GASP operates its own complaint department; it forwards citizen complaints to the control agency and keeps track of action taken.

GASP conducts an extensive education program. Through its speakers bureau, it tells the pollution story throughout the county. It conducts seminars for students, teachers, the clergy and the general public. It distributes information kits and sponsors guided tours of "pollution land" in the Pittsburgh area.

GASP also publishes educational materials. It identifies major polluters by name and tells what is being done about them. It refutes what it calls "ecological pornography"—false information issued by polluters—and gives "awards" to major polluters.

The impact of this citizen group can be measured by these facts: Allegheny County (the Pittsburgh area) has one of the most stringent air pollution control codes in the nation and one of the most effective pollution control agencies. Most polluters in the area are on planned compliance schedules and most are meeting their commitments. Polluters who fail to take corrective measures face the prospect that GASP will take them to court as it has already done in one instance.

GASP explains its basic approach: "We work within the system in a responsible manner. We do not ask the impossible. But we demand compliance at the earliest possible moment within the state of the art of pollution control."

San Francisco Bay — The "Magic of Concerned Citizen Action"

In 1960, three women living in the San Francisco Bay area decided to try to do something about the plight of the Bay, a magnificent natural resource. They were concerned about its appearance and disappearance. When California became a state in 1850, the surface of the Bay measured about 650 square miles. By 1960, it was down to approximately 430 square miles, the result of filling, diking and other development. Pending proposals, the women knew, would take another 59 square miles of the Bay.

The women discussed the problems of the Bay's future with conservationists and other concerned citizens, and a new citizen organization soon was established — the Save San Francisco Bay Association.

The new group immediately undertook two projects. It prompted a study of the Bay by the University of California's Institute for Governmental Studies at Berkeley. And it enlisted the support of an influential state senator. The study resulted in a book in 1963 entitled "The Future of San Francisco Bay." Aided by the study and increasing public pressure generated largely by the Save the Bay Association, the state senator successfully shepherded a bill through the California legislature creating an official commission to study the bay.

The commission, in turn, recommended development of a regional plan to manage and protect the Bay. A new legislative proposal was prepared and submitted to the California legislature in 1965. It called for creation of the San Francisco Bay Conservation and Development Commission which would prepare a comprehensive and enforceable plan for the conservation of the Bay's water and the development of its shoreline.

The group mounted a massive public campaign in support of the bill to establish the commission. Included were mailings of small bags of sand to state legislators with this message: "You'll wonder where the water went if you fill the Bay with sediment."

The legislature passed the bill creating the commission. It provided a four-year period to complete the work and to protect the Bay during the study and planning period, the commission was given unprecedented veto power over development projects. The study was completed in 1969, and a report was submitted to the state recommending creation of a permanent regional agency to plan and regulate use of the entire Bay as a unit.

New legislation was introduced to implement the commission's recommendations. Development interests attempted to delay or weaken the bill, and a major conservation battle ensued. The Save the Bay Association and other citizen organizations went into action once again.

They applied "people pressure" to state officials through letters, telegrams and personal visits. They arranged for thousands of citizens to visit the state capitol in support of the proposed law. An editorial in the *San Francisco Chronicle* expressed the public's growing anger and aggressiveness, declaring: "It should not be necessary to warn legislators representing this region that the people of the Bay area will be unforgiving to those who fail in their responsibility to save the Bay from unwise exploitation, disfigurement and diminishment."

After several months of controversy in 1969, the years of effort to save the Bay finally succeeded. The legislature passed, and the governor signed the legislation which created a permanent Bay Conservation and Development Commission with strong authority to manage the Bay in the public interest.

The new law was a landmark achievement in effective management of natural resources through land-use planning and regional consensus. It has since been emulated in other states.

Commenting on the historic law, the *San Francisco Chronicle* said: "All hail to it and to the thousands whose work and perserverance carried this legislation through the legislature . . . Continued public interest and demand—what has been called the 'magic of concerned citizen action'—can keep it strong and effective."

Chicago — "The People Are The City"

Some 50 years ago, Carl Sandburg wrote in "The Windy City":

"It is wisdom to think the people are the city.
It is wisdom to think the city would fall to pieces and die and be dust in the wind
If the people of the city all move away and leave no people at all to watch and keep the city."

Today, many people in Chicago are "watching and keeping" their city on the environmental front through a variety of citizen organizations.

One group, the Open Lands Project, seeks to protect open spaces and water areas for conservation, recreation and scientific purposes. OLP provides planning and legal expertise to citizen groups, public agencies and private property owners on ways of preserving desirable natural areas and often acts as a nonprofit middleman in land transactions.

Another organization, the Citizens Action Program, uses direct pressure on government and industry to force action on pollution and other community problems. CAP mobilizes citizens to attend regulatory agency hearings, stimulates petition campaigns and conducts boycotts and demonstrations to dramatize the need for pollution control and other action.

Still another group, Businessmen for the Public Interest, specializes in lawsuits to combat pollution. BPI has initiated or joined in more than a dozen anti-pollution lawsuits against government agencies and industries. It also uses petitions, press releases and newspaper advertisements to urge environmental improvement and other urban social reforms.

Yet another group, the Clean Air Coordinating Committee, concentrates on air pollution control, pressing for strict laws and their effective implementation through a variety of citizen action techniques.

The League of Women Voters also is active in environmental issues through its 35 Cook County chapters and through a four-state group which deals specifically with Lake Michigan and its pollution problems.

In addition, branches of national conservation organizations carry on education and action programs on environmental problems in the Chicago area.

Together, these groups have made Chicago, in the words of the Conservation Foundation, "one hotbed of citizen environmental action."

Among the notable successes growing out of this citizen action and the public awareness of environmental problems are:

- The city of Chicago strengthened its control ordinance.
- The electric utility company serving the area began using low-sulfur coal.
- The state regulatory agency conditioned a rate increase for the utility on the installation of pollution control equipment.
- The regional sewage treatment agency instituted an industrial waste surcharge and acquired outlying lands for sludge disposal, permitting an air-polluting sludge incinerator to be phased out.

A citizen organization also unearthed an unused 60-year-old law which forbids refuse discharges into Lake Michigan from two counties and enabled the government to prevent large industries from making discharges into the Lake. Faced with the prospect of court suits, two power companies in-

stalled cooling towers instead of discharging heated water from nuclear power plants directly into Lake Michigan.

Citizen action also has been instrumental in efforts to establish new trails in the area, to raise private funds for the acquisition and preservation of valuable natural areas and to protect Lake Michigan and its shoreline from development.

The Businessmen for the Public Interest, has used newspaper advertisements for environmental purposes. On one occasion, BPI ran an ad opposing the city's plan to fill in a portion of Lake Michigan for a new airport. The ad was captioned "Don't Do It In The Lake". Buttons and bumper stickers have spread the slogan throughout the area. In opposition to the same proposed airport, the Open Lands Project group conducted and made public the first major independent analysis of the airport proposal.

Citizen groups in the Chicago area comprise a militant force for environmental improvement. In the words of Father Leonard Dubi, a Catholic priest who is co-chairman of Citizens Action Program, "inch by inch, centimeter by centimeter, the changes are coming. We're like little amoebae. We just grow and grow. We have begun a fight . . . and we will see it to the end."

Conclusion

The Pittsburgh, San Francisco and Chicago stories are not unique. Similar accounts can be written about citizen action programs in many other cities. For citizen involvement and action has become an integral part of the movement for environmental quality in the United States.

The citizen activities described here are an outgrowth of rising public awareness and understanding of environmental problems — and of public frustration with the pace at which government and industry have moved to solve these problems. Working within established systems, citizen action groups have helped to focus public opinion on the environment.

While citizen action is not a substitute for action by government and industry, it serves to remind government and industry of their environmental responsibilities. While it does not provide mechanisms for resolving environmental policy issues, citizen action forces government to devise new legislative and administrative mechanisms to deal with environmental problems.

Citizen concern and citizen action has led to the enactment of new environmental protection laws and regulations in the United States at the local, state and federal levels and has compelled government to implement these laws and regulations.

President Richard M. Nixon noted in 1971 that "in the final analysis, the foundation on which environmental progress rests in our society is a responsible and informed citizenry. My confidence that our nation will meet its environmental problems in the years ahead is based in large measure on my faith in the continued vigilance of American public opinion and in the continued vitality of citizen efforts to protect and improve the environment."

From the record, as outlined in this brief report, there can be no doubt of the vitality of citizen environmental efforts in the United States. Private citizens, individually and through their voluntary organizations, have demonstrated that there are indeed many answers to the question "What can I Do?"

In addition to these activities, there are other, more personal kinds of actions which citizens concerned about the environment can undertake.

- Promote clean-up campaigns of shorelines, streambeds, parks, roadsides.
- Don't burn trash or leaves.
- Keep home furnaces clean and operating properly.
- Keep car engines tuned and operating properly.
- Use public transportation whenever possible.
- Cut down on unnecessary use of electricity and water.
- Don't use persistent pesticides.
- Don't litter.
- Take waste cans, bottles and newspapers to recycling centers.
- Keep the volume down on televisions, radios and phonographs.

- Refuse to buy products made from the fur, feathers or hides of endangered species.
- Speak out on environmental issues through letters to the press and public officials.
- Support citizen environmental organizations.

For further information refer to:

1. "Community Action for Environmental Quality" – Published by the Citizens' Advisory Committee on Environmental Quality. Available from the Government Printing Office, Washington, D.C.
2. "Your Right to Clean Air" – Manual for citizen action published by the Conservation Foundation, 1717 Massachusetts Avenue N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.
3. "Citizen's Guide to Action for Clean Water" – Published by and available from the Izaak Walton League, 1326 Waukegan Road, Glenview, Illinois 60025.
4. "Your Environment and What You Can Do About It" – By Richard Saltonstall, Jr., Walker & Co., New York City.

For details on citizen action operations, write:

1. GASP, Box 2850, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania 15230
2. Save San Francisco Bay Association, Box 925, Berkeley, California 94701
3. Business for the Public Interest, 109 N. Dearborn Street, Chicago, Illinois 60602
4. League of Women Voters, 1730 M St., N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036

EPA CITIZENS' BULLETIN contains information occasionally reissued for interested citizens. March, 1972.

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